DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 582 EA 016 243

AUTHOR Allison, Derek J.
TITLE Current Attractions of Teaching As Perceived by Preservice Students.
PUB DATE 3 Dec 82
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; College Students; *Education Majors; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Occupational Aspiration; *Preservice Teacher Education; Student Attitudes; *Student Motivation; *Teaching (Occupation); *Vocational Interests
IDENTIFIERS Ontario

ABSTRACT

The population for this study of specific attractions to teaching was defined as the students enrolled in the primary-junior and intermediate-senior consecutive teacher education programs at an Ontario Faculty of Education. Respondents were required to rate the importance of 15 desirable opportunities offered by teaching and were also asked to indicate their degree of commitment to obtaining a teaching position and to a career in teaching. Comparisons with earlier studies indicate that the creative opportunities offered by teaching appear more important to contemporary students and that these students are more attracted to service to children, rather than to society in general or to broadly conceived ideals. Those who were strongly committed to obtaining a teaching position scored factors relating to creativity, children, subject, and prestige as more important to them than did those who were less strongly committed to obtaining employment as teachers. The less committed students considered the salary and working conditions as more important than did the strongly committed students. The intermediate-senior students considered the subject to be significantly more important to them than did the primary-junior students. Two summary tables accompany the text. (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED235582

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Derek J. Allison

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CURRENT ATTRACTIONS OF TEACHING AS PERCEIVED BY PRESERVICE STUDENTS

by

Derek J. Allison

University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario

December 3, 1982

EA 016 143

Despite the severely reduced demand for newly qualified teachers, enrolment at Faculties of Education remains relatively high. This suggests that teaching continues to be perceived as an attractive occupational choice by many young people. Furthermore, some pre-service students may not be as strongly committed to teaching as others. Some, for instance, may see teaching as a desirable occupation but, cognizant of the current employment situation, they may be contemplating alternate employment. What, then, do pre-service students perceive to be the attractions of teaching and do their perceptions differ according to their declared commitment to teaching? My purpose in this paper is to present answers to these questions derived from data recently gathered from students enrolled in a large Ontario Faculty of Education.

The Attractions of Teaching

Based on interviews with practicing teachers and the results of a number of surveys, Lortie (1975, p.26-36) identified five major "attractors to teaching." In order of their relative importance, these were (1) the opportunity for extended contact and interaction with children and young people, (2) the provision of "a valuable service of special moral worth", (3) the opportunity to remain involved in school life or in a particular subject area, (4) material rewards such as an adequate salary and some prestige, and (5) the convenient working conditions characteristic of teaching. These major thematic attractions are identified in most of the previous research into why young people are attracted to teaching. Wood (1978), for example, found that most of the students in her introductory education course in New York were attracted to teaching mainly because of the opportunities to be and work with children. Results of earlier studies by Hood (1965), Fox (1961) and Fielstra (1955) also tend to support Lortie's scheme. In each of these studies the opportunities for being with children and providing service were

found most attractive to pre-service students, while material benefits and status were the least attractive aspects of teaching. The attractiveness of desirable working conditions was generally found to fall between these other attractions.

Neufeld's (1974) study of 445 University of Alberta education students is particularly interesting. These students ranked eleven opportunities offered by teaching in order of their importance to them. The findings followed the pattern noted above with "the opportunity to work with young people and be an encouragement to them" being ranked as most attractive, the opportunity "to help students develop sound attitudes and values for living" being ranked second, and the attractions of security, salary, recognition and status ranked lowest. One attraction included in Neufeld's study that is not easily accommodated in Lortie's scheme was the opportunity to "creatively express and utilize your talents, skills and interests." The Alberta students ranked this fourth out of the eleven items, ahead of desirable working conditions and immediately after working in a subject field of interest.

These studies, and much of the other relevant research, concentrated on specific attractions to teaching. In some studies twenty or more attractions are identified and considered. Most of the major attractions, however, would appear to be subsumed by the five themes identified by Lortie. Nevertheless, little attention has been given to identifying the major thematic attractions that appeal to pre-service students.

An Ontario Study

The population for the present study was defined as the students enrolled in the primary-junior and intermediate-senior consecutive teacher education programmes at an Ontario Faculty of Education. As the entry requirements are similar for all such programmes in the province, it was assumed that these students would be representative of those in similar programmes in other Faculties. Questionnaires were administered to students attending several sections of a compulsory educational

foundations course early in 1982. Usable responses totalled 222 cases, which represented 42% of the defined population. Inspection of the demographic data suggested that the sample was representative of the population in terms of age, sex and level of formal education.

The questionnaire was an expanded adaptation of that used by Neufeld (1974, p.23) in her study of Alberta students. Respondents were required to rate the importance of fifteen desirable opportunities offered by teaching, on a scale ranging from "highly important to me" to "no importance to me." The students were also asked to indicate their degree of commitment to obtaining a teaching position and to a career in teaching.

Results

In order of their rated importance, the most highly scored attractions to teaching were the opportunities to "be an encouragement to children and young people", "to creatively express and utilize my talents, skills and interests", to "work with children and young people" and to "work in a subject matter field of great interest." The items with the lowest mean importance scores were to "get as good a salary as I could probably earn" and "to hold a prestigious position in the community." The attractions of desirable working conditions and rendering an important service were both scored in the middle range.

In general terms, therefore, the opportunities offered by teaching appealed to the Ontario students in much to same way as they did to their Alberta counterparts almost a decade ago. In order to investigate the degree of agreement, the attractions which were directly comparable with those in Neufeld's questionnaire were ranked according to the magnitude of their mean scores and compared with ranks obtained in the earlier study. For the most part the items were equally ranked

or within one rank of each other, the Spearman correlation coefficient being .94 ($p < .01$). The most noteworthy rank discrepancy involved the opportunity to creatively express and utilize talents, skills and interests. This was ranked second out of the ten comparable items in the present study, and fourth in the earlier study.

A factor analysis was conducted on the scores for the specific attractions in order to identify the major thematic attractions to teaching. Five factors were extracted, but they did not correspond completely to those identified by Lortie. The first factor was composed of items concerning the opportunity to work with and help children and young people as well as items dealing with opportunities to be of service. Lortie's identification of an independent altruistic attraction was not, therefore, supported in this study. This first factor, which accounted for 24% of the variance, was named the Children attractor.

The items loading on the second factor were the opportunity to "work in a subject field" and "to help youngsters gain knowledge in my subject field." This factor was named the Subject attractor, and clearly represents the third major attraction theme identified by Lortie.

The third factor was named the Creative attractor. Only one item, the opportunity "to be creative in my work" loaded heavily on this factor, but the loading was an impressive .95. The opportunity to "creatively express and utilize my talents, skills and interests, also loaded on this factor, but the loading was a relatively weak .32. This attraction to teaching was not identified in Lortie's analysis. As noted above, however, it would appear to be particularly appealing to contemporary pre-service students.

The final two factors were named Material Benefits and Prestige respectively. The first of these embodied the attraction of desirable working conditions and the opportunity to earn a good salary. Prestige accounted for the opportunity to "hold a prestigious position in the community" and the opportunity for "advancement and

promotion as an educator." The combination of these two opportunities suggests that pre-service students equate status as a teacher with career success in the profession.

These last two factors represent another departure from Lortie's analysis, for he identified prestige as one aspect of the material rewards associated with teaching, and recognized desirable working conditions as an independent attractor. The present analysis, however, unambiguously associates desirable working conditions with a good salary, while recognizing status aspects of teaching as an independent attractor.

The discrepancies between the factors isolated in this study and those identified by Lortie suggest that current pre-service students perceive the major thematic attractions of teaching differently from the practicing teachers on whom Lortie based his analysis. The comparison with the Alberta data indicated that the creative opportunities offered by teaching appear more important to contemporary students and it seems reasonable to suspect that this aspect of teaching may not have been as relevant to the practicing teachers who furnished Lortie's data, many of whom would have entered teaching in the 1960's and 1950's, or even the 1940's. Similarly, altruistic motives do not appear to have great relevance in contemporary society. Thus, while "being of service" may have constituted a major attraction to teaching in earlier times, its potency may now have waned. The notion of service remains important, but it appears that contemporary students are more attracted to service to children, rather than to society in general or to broadly conceived ideals.

Lortie may have been in error when he separated the attraction of desirable working conditions from other material benefits, for working conditions are normally considered an integral part of the "benefit package" associated with a particular occupation. His argument for doing so, however, rested upon the particular appeal that the working schedule of teachers would have for women who were anticipating marriage and the demands of family life. Given that teaching is

is an occupation which has traditionally attracted a large proportion of women, this argument has relevance. Its cogency at the present time, however, would appear to have decreased as a consequence of recent re-orientations in sex-role expectations in our society. The attractive working conditions of teaching, therefore, may no longer have a particularly strong appeal to young women, and this would encourage the perception of this attraction as one of the material benefits associated with teaching. Support for this interpretation was provided when no statistically significant difference was found between the male and female scores on the working conditions item in the present study.

The differences between the present analysis and that offered by Lortie are not as great as may at first appear, as is illustrated in Table 1 which shows the relative importance of the five major attractors to the students. The attractions cluster into two major groups with the Creativity, Children and Subject factors all receiving high importance scores and the Material Benefits and Prestige factors both being scored low. With the exception of the Creativity factor, the overall order of importance remains essentially the same as that given by Lortie, although the definition of the major factors differs in some respects from Lortie's major attractors. The major difference lies in the inclusion of the Creativity attraction and the exclusion of altruistic motives as a major independent attraction.

Table 1 also shows the mean scores and their respective ranks for students in the two specialized programs. The major difference between the two groups is that the intermediate-senior students considered the Subject attractor to be significantly more important to them than did the primary-junior students. The relative importance of the other two most attractive factors also differed between the two groups. The primary-junior students considered the Creativity and the Children factors to be more important to them than did the intermediate-senior students. These differences were not, however, statistically significant. Both

TABLE 1

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE
FIVE SOURCES OF ATTRACTION
TO THE 1982 PRE-SERVICE STUDENTS

Attraction Themes	Total sample n = 222		Primary-junior n = 114		Intermediate-senior n = 108	
	rank	$\bar{x}$ [1]	rank	$\bar{x}$	rank	$\bar{x}$
Creativity	1	3.50	1	3.53	2	3.46
Children	2.5	3.44	2	3.50	3	3.39
Subject	2.5	3.44	3	3.30	1	3.60*
Material Benefits	4	2.63	4	2.60	4	2.70
Prestige	5	2.17	5	2.15	5	2.20

1 Scoring 4 = very important
3 = important
2 = little importance
1 = no importance

* Analysis of variance between the primary-junior and intermediate-senior scores produced an F value of 11.67 which is significant beyond the .001 level.

groups attached similarly low levels of importance to the Material Benefits and Prestige factors.

Commitment to Teaching
and Attractions to Teaching

When asked to declare their commitment to teaching, 126 students, that is 57% of the sample, indicated that they were strongly committed to a career in teaching and 144 (64%) that they were strongly committed to obtaining a teaching position. These figures suggest that a respectable proportion of pre-service students may have a much more pragmatic attitude to teaching than is normally supposed. Furthermore, as is shown in Table 2, consistent differences were found between the importance attached to the attractions of teaching by the strongly and less committed students. Those who were strongly committed to obtaining a teaching position scored the Creativity, Children, Subject and Prestige attractions of teaching as more important to them than did those who were less strongly committed to obtaining employment as a teacher. The direction of the difference was reversed, however, with regard to the Material Benefits associated with teaching. In this case the less committed considered the salary and working conditions as more important than did the strongly committed students. One-way analysis of variance of these differences indicated that they were all significant beyond the .01 level of probability.

A similar pattern was found with commitment to a career in teaching with the difference between the mean scores being more pronounced on the Creativity and Children attractors. No significant difference was found, however, on the Prestige attractor. Similar differences were also found when the responses of students enrolled in the two programmes were analysed independently, but the effect was more marked for the intermediate-senior students. Thus only small and non-significant differences were found for the strongly and less strongly committed

TABLE 2

MEAN SCORES AND SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES FOR THE IMPORTANT OF THE MAJOR ATTRACTIONS TO TEACHING TO PRE-SERVICE STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT DEGREES OF COMMMITMENT TO TEACHING

	Level of declared commitment to ...			
	a career in teaching		obtaining a teaching position	
	strong n = 126	less than strong n = 96	strong n = 144	less than strong n = 78
Major Attractions	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$
Creativity	3.64[1]	3.31***	3.58	3.33**
Children	3.56	3.29***	3.54	3.26***
Subject	3.60	3.24***	3.53	3.28**
Material Benefits	2.50	2.81**	2.51	2.87***
Prestige	2.25	2.08 N.S.	2.26	2.02**

[1] On a scale where -
4 = was most important
3 = was important
2 = was of little importance
1 = was of no importance

N.S. - No significant difference
** - $p = < .01$
*** - $p = < .001$

primary-junior students on the Material Benefits and Prestige factors. These differences were much more pronounced, however, for the secondary level students: those who were less strongly committed to acquiring a position and making a career teaching being markedly more attracted to the material benefits and the status offered by teaching.

Discussion

The opportunity to be and work with children continues to be one of the major attractions of teaching for pre-service students. By itself, this suggests that respectable numbers of young people will continue to seek entry into Faculties of Education for, as noted by Lortie (1975, p.27), teaching is the only major occupation which allows individuals to "work with children who are neither ill nor especially disadvantaged" under what are well understood and probably comfortable conditions. Even though many of those who prepare for teaching may not find employment, individuals who are particularly interested in working with children will likely remain attracted to the possibility of being a teacher. Furthermore, the results of the study summarised here suggest the other attractions of teaching ensure that the occupation will not lack for would-be entrants. The opportunities for creativity perceived by pre-service students seems particularly important in this respect, for this is not an attribute associated with many other forms of employment.

Nevertheless, more than 40% of the students in the sample declared that they were not strongly committed to either a career in teaching or to obtaining a teaching position. Furthermore, these students regarded the access to children and the creative attractions of teaching as significantly less important to them than did those who were strongly committed to teaching. There are several implications to this. One is that the more committed students would seem to conform more closely to the attitudes associated with good teaching. That is, they are more

interested in children, creativity and teaching particular subject matter. One must wonder, however, at the motives and expectations of those pre-service students who are not strongly committed to teaching. It may be that there is a self-selection process at work among pre-service students, and the commitment of some students declines as they realize they may not value the same things in teaching as do their peers. If this is the case, then because the data for this study were gathered when the students were almost two thirds of their way through their programmes, the commitment of some students may have declined since they began their programme. On the other hand, some students may well enter the programme with little commitment to teaching. The analysis summarised in Table 2 suggests that some of these students are attracted to the salary and working conditions associated with teaching. Others, however, may see a B.Ed. degree as a valuable and/or necessary requirements for the pursuit of other occupational ambitions. Whatever the motives of less committed students may be, their presence in teacher preparation programmes holds implications for administrators and instructors in Faculties of Education.

The other major finding of the study was that contemporary pre-service students do not appear to be attracted to teaching because of the opportunity to be of service to society, or other ideals and agencies which are external to schools. This is in contrast with Lortie's analysis and the findings of earlier studies by Hood (1965), Fox (1962) and Fielstra (1955). The students in this study still valued the idea of "being of service" but they tended to associate this with the opportunity to work with and help children and young people. The implication is that should these students become practicing teachers, then they will likely be much more concerned with and responsive to the needs, problems and aspirations of individual school children. This seems most appropriate within the context of recent educational policies and practices. There are strong indications, however, that future policies will place increased emphasis on school and teacher accountability to authorities and agencies external to schools. This may be

difficult for teachers who perceive their mission as being of service to children, rather than society.

A final point worthy of notice is that the students in the two programmes perceived the major attractions to teaching in different, but apt, ways. Students preparing for intermediate and secondary level positions placed significantly greater importance on the Subject attractor than did their elementary colleagues. On the other hand, the most attractive aspect of teaching for students in the primary-junior programme was the opportunity to work with and encourage children. Furthermore, students in both programmes valued the creative opportunities offered by teaching. In both cases, therefore, the combination of attractions which were most highly valued by the different groups of students seemed most appropriate for the positions to which they may aspire.

REFERENCES

Fielstra, C. "An Analysis of Factors Influencing the Decision to Become a Teacher." *Journal of Educational Research.* 68.8. 1955

Fox, R.B. "Factors Influencing the Career Choice of Prospective Teachers." *Journal of Teacher Education.* 12. 4. 1961

Hood, C.E. "Teaching as a Career." *Clearing House.* December, 1965

Lortie, D.C. Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 1975.

Neufeld, N.S. "Why Choose the Teaching Profession?" *Saskatchewan Journal of Educational Research and Development.* 5.1.1974

Wood, K.E. "What Motivates Students to Teach?" *Journal of Teacher Education.* 29. 6. 1978